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THE SOIL CONSERVATION PROGRAM IN THE NORTH CENTRAL STATES

A radio talk by G. B. Thorne, director North Central Division, AAA, broadcast Monday, April 6, 1936, in the Department of Agriculture period, National Farm and Home Hour, by WMAL and 49 other stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company.

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Thank you Morse. I'll start right in on my report.

I don't believe that many of you in the North Central Region need to be told that there is a soil conservation program, and that that program is now being put into effect. The meetings that are being held now in every farming community in the Corn Belt States are proof enough that a great deal of work is being done. At these meetings, farmers are learning the details of the new program and are electing their community and county committeemen. These committeemen will carry a large share of the load of administering the program. Needless to say, the success of the soil conservation program in the counties and communities will depend upon them.

State committees, too, will play a big part in the program. They will supervise the work in the States. The names of the committeemen for each of the North Central States were announced Friday.

I believe that we all realize that the soil conservation program is a direct approach to a serious problem. In brief, here is the problem.

For many years, over-cropping and soil erosion have been seriously damaging our farmland. This damage has gone so far that we must do something to curb it in the next few years if we wish to maintain farmers' incomes and to assure the Nation of a continuing and adequate food supply. One of the best ways to meet the situation is to shift some of the land out of such crops that deplete the soil of its fertility and leave it open to erosion, and into such crops or farm practices which conserve the soil and build up its fertility. In other words, we want to increase our acreage of grasses and legumes that are so beneficial to the soil and which provide a protective cover to the land.

This year, the goal for the whole country is to divert 30 million acres from soil-depleting crops into soil-building and conserving crops. Since the soil-depleting crops are practically always the cash crops taken off the land, the shifts will mean out-of-pocket expense for farmers. So the program provides for direct Government grants to farmers who measure up to approved standards of soil conservation and improvement.

In 1936, the total available money that can be spent on the program for the entire country is 470 million dollars. A proportionate share of the money will be available for grants to farmers in the North Central Region.

These soil conservation grants will consist of two classes of payments. Class I payments will be made for each acre -- up to a maximum -- of the soil-depleting base which in 1936 is diverted to soil-conserving and soil-building crops. Class II payments will be made for new seedings of approved soil-building crops or for the adoption of approved soil-building practices. A farmer may qualify for either or both classes of payments depending upon the

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kind of performance he makes.

But, in starting his farming operations for the year, a farmer who wants to be eligible for payments needs to know the list of soil-depleting crops for the North Central Region, and how his base acreage of those soil-depleting crops will be established. He needs to know the approved soil-building crops and practices. And he needs to know what the rates of payment will be.

Today, I can give the general answers to these questions. Your county agent or your local committee can supply further details that you need to know.

First, the list of soil-depleting crops. I'll name the crops on that list. They are: Corn; tobacco; Irish and sweet potatoes; rice; sugar beets; hemp; cultivated sunflowers; commercial truck and canning crops; grain sorghums and sweet sorghums; small grains harvested for grain or hay, including wheat, oats, barley, rye, buckwheat, flax, emmer, speltz, and grain mixtures; annual grasses like sudan and millets; certain annual legumes, which are soybeans, field beans, cowpeas and field peas harvested for grain or hay. That is the list of soil-depleting crops. Crop land that is idle in 1936 also will be counted as soil-depleting.

In the North Central Region the soil-conserving and soil-building crops include practically all kinds of legumes, and the perennial grasses which are grown on crop land. Crop land is defined as that land from which at least one crop (other than wild hay) has been harvested since January 1, 1930. There are other qualifications for some of these legumes and grasses. If they are grown with a nurse crop in 1936, the nurse crop must be clipped green or pastured sufficiently to prevent grain formation if the crop is to be classed as soil conserving. Soybeans and cowpeas are legumes, but they are not considered as soil-conserving and soil-building crops in the North Central Region unless they are turned under as green manure crops.

After a farmer has figured out the classification of his crop acres, the next step is to establish the base acreage of soil-depleting crops for his farm. This will be done with the aid of his committeemen. The starting point in figuring the soil-depleting base will be the acreage of soil-depleting crops harvested on the farm in 1935. This crop acreage history for last year will be entered on a work sheet, and from this information the community committee will establish a soil-depleting base for the farm. This base will serve as the standard for measuring the degree of performance in soil conservation on the farm.

In general, the soil-depleting base will be the total of all acres in soil depleting crops harvested on the farm in 1935. But adjustments will be made by the committee to allow for acres retired under last year's commodity programs and for unusual conditions such as floods and drought. Committees are also instructed to adjust bases so as to bring about a fair relationship between individual bases in the community.

On farms where one or more of the special crops -- cotton, tobacco, sugar beets and flax -- are grown, the soil-depleting base will be determined in a slightly different way, and payments for shifts from the base also will be somewhat different. Farmers interested in these special crops can get details from their committeemen or from the county agent.

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This is about the way it will work. Farmers may qualify for the Class I payment if they divert some of their soil-depleting base acreage to soil-conserving and soil-building crops. The payment will be on a per-acre basis and will vary between farms, between counties and between States according to the relative productivity of the land. The average rate for the whole country will be about \$10 an acre. A farmer may receive the per-acre payment for his farm for shifting from soil-depleting crops any number of acres up to 15 percent of the total number of acres in his soil-depleting base.

In addition to receiving the Class I payment, a farmer who takes definite steps to build up the productive capacity of his land in 1936 may qualify for a Class II payment. In making this payment the Government is sharing with the farmer the cost of seed and other materials for planting new seedings of certain specified crops or for the adoption of approved soil-building practices. Last Wednesday, a list of Class II payments for the North Central States was announced. The rate for new seedings of alfalfa and sericea on crop land is \$2 an acre. One dollar and fifty cents an acre will be paid for seedings of red clover and mammoth clover, and \$1 an acre for alsike, sweet and white clovers and Korean Lespedeza. Seedings of legume mixtures will vary from \$1 to \$1.50 an acre. Soybeans and cowpeas turned under as green manure, \$1.50 an acre. Two dollars and a half an acre will be paid for applying on crop land or pasture at least 2 tons of limestone per acre. Five dollars an acre will be paid for the planting of forest trees on crop land or pasture land according to approved standards.

There is a limit, however, on the amount of the Class II payment that a farmer may receive. Regardless of the number of acres devoted to approved practices, the Class II payment for any farm cannot be more than a sum obtained by multiplying the number of acres of all crop land in soil-conserving and building crops in 1936 by \$1. A farmer may earn \$45 for seeding 30 acres to red clover at \$1.50 an acre, but if he has only 40 acres of soil-conserving and soil-building crops on his farm this year, his Class II payment cannot exceed \$40.

Suppose we take one example, and see how both kinds of payment would work on a typical farm of 160 acres. We will say that this farm has 120 acres of crop land; the rest is in permanent pasture, farm buildings, etc. Let us say that the farm has a soil-depleting base of 100 acres, and that 20 acres is in second-year clover. The farmer seeds the maximum of 15 percent of his 100-acre soil-depleting base to alfalfa. That gives him 15 acres in alfalfa and leaves 85 acres in soil-depleting crops. Assuming that his crop land is of average productivity, his payment for diverting the 15 acres ^{to alfalfa} would be \$10 an acre. That would qualify him for a Class I payment of \$150.

In addition, he earns a Class II payment of \$2 an acre for seeding the alfalfa -- \$2 times 15 acres -- or \$30. However, he has 35 acres in soil-conserving and soil-building crops on his farm -- the 15 acres in alfalfa and the 20 acres in clover. So the limit for a Class II payment on his farm is \$35. To get the extra \$5, this farmer may lime two acres of his land at \$2 $\frac{1}{2}$ an acre. This farmer then qualifies for the maximum payments of \$150 and \$35, and will receive a soil conservation grant of \$185.

Just before closing, I want to emphasize one more thing. A farmer who wants to qualify for a payment this year needs to get together with his committeemen very soon to help fill out a work sheet for his farm. Making out the work sheet puts no obligation on anyone. If a farmer finds out later that he does

not or cannot measure up to the standards of the program, no harm has been done. But he should avail himself of the opportunity in the next few weeks to determine what it is necessary for him to do on his farm in order to be eligible to receive a soil conservation grant.

In providing grants for soil conservation in 1936, the Government is offering to share with farmers the expense of improving the fertility and productivity of their own farms. But the program is not only to the personal interest of the individual farmer. It is also definitely in the public interest, since it is designed to safeguard the Nation's soil resources, and to provide an adequate future supply of food and fiber crops.

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